DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 263 962 JC 860 008

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TITLE Early Assessment of High School Juniors' College Skills.
INSTITUTION Clark Technical Coll., Springfield, Ohio.
PUB DATE [85]
NOTE 10p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Articulation (Education); *College Bound Students; *College Preparation; *College School Cooperation; Community Colleges; High Schools; *High School Students; Language Tests; Mathematics Tests; Program Descriptions; Student Placement; *Testing Programs; Writing Evaluation

ABSTRACT

In response to low college-going rates and low persistence rates of college students, Clark Technical College (CTC) initiated the High School Liaison Project to improve articulation between the college and local schools. The project served as an umbrella for several related activities, including a program for assessing the potential college skills of high school juniors. CTC's role in the state-supported testing program was to encourage all area schools to participate, to promote high levels of participation among the students, to work with Ohio State University to develop a more discriminating diagnostic test for math skills, and to identify an appropriate test for cost effectively assessing students' English skills. The results of the early assessment program have included: (1) a 73% increase in senior math enrollments; (2) a decrease in the number of students needing remedial math courses from 34% in fall 1983 to 25% in fall 1984; (3) participation by 26 of 29 high schools in CTC's service area; (4) encouragement of students to take college-preparatory English courses rather than general ones; and (5) continuing interest in program participation by all of the schools involved in 1984-85. This description of CTC's involvement in the early assessment program presents information on the use of the Written English Expression Placement Test, including an outline of testing and feedback procedures for students and schools. (EJV)

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EARLY ASSESSMENT OF HIGH SCHOOL JUNIORS' COLLEGE SKILLS

BY

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In the summer of 1984, Clark Technical College in Springfield, Ohio, found itself in a situation similar to many other collegiate institutions in the United States. First of all, Ohio has low overall college-going rates. The state as a whole sends about 43% of its high school students to college compared to 53% in the nation as a whole. Between different area schools, the college-going percentage may vary from 60 to 25 percent. Ohio, like other states, is also concerned about low survival rates of students once in college. A recent study by a large state university confirmed that only about 30% of its graduates had graduated on time in the past seven years and that the overall graduation rate is approximately 50%. These statistics support the premise that we are indeed a nation at risk. Such statistics are even more disturbing in that future high school graduates will need more collegiate training and better skills to meet the demands of the service and information age we are facing in the decades ahead.

In response to these statistics, Clark Technical College's President, Dr. George H. Robertson, initiated the High School Liaison Project to improve the articulation

between the College and the local schools. This project served as an umbrella for several related activities, including a Board of Trustees Merit Scholarship, a Writing Competition for high school students, 2+2 programs linking the last two years of high school with the first two years of college, and a summer College Survival Skills "Bridge" Program for high school students. The centerpiece of the High School Liaison Project, however, was a program that assessed the potential college skills of high school juniors. "Early Assessment" of the math and English skills of high school juniors is being pioneered in Ohio and is supported by the Ohio Board of Regents through several substantially funded programs. Mathematics and English are being tested as the skills basic to a student's survival in college.

In mathematics, over 60,000 juniors in the state are tested through the Early Math Placement Test (EMPT), a highly sophisticated program funded by the Ohio Board of Regents and managed through Ohio State University. The test instrument asks students to list the colleges and majors in which they are interested. Each student then receives a computerized report indicating the specific mathematics course (including remedial levels) in which the student would be placed at any of the 12 state universities and seven two-year colleges that participate in the EMPT program. Clark Technical College's role in the EMPT was to encourage all area schools to participate, to encourage high levels of participation among all juniors in every school (some have been inclined to test

only "college-bound" juniors), and to work with OSU to develop a test that will permit more discrimination for diagnostic purposes in the lower achievement range.

Juniors are encouraged to take the EMPT early enough in their junior year so that they may undertake any necessary remedial work in their senior year. In 1978, the pilot high school for the EMPT realized a 73% increase in senior math enrollments the following year as a direct result of the early testing. In addition to ensuring a higher survival rate of students, Early Asessment also has another obvious advantage: colleges need to offer fewer remedial sections. Dr. Bert Waits, Director of the EMPT, reports that the number of Ohio State University students needing remedial courses was down to 25% in Autumn 1984 from 34% in Autumn 1983 and from 43% in Autumn 1979. Such dramatic improvements cannot wholly be ascribed to Early Assessment but those associated with the program believe it has made a real difference.

Unlike the centralized, machine-processed approach used in mathematics, the Early Assessment of English skills of high school students in Ohio has been decentralized in a number of colleges and universities. This is partly because composition testing is difficult to administer on a large scale and partly because many English specialists favor a writing sample, which does not lend itself to machine scoring. Clark Technical College's Early English Assessment Program, now moving into its second year, is one of the few two-year college programs offered in the state and the only

one that uses a machine-scored test as the basic instrument. This instrument was chosen for the first year of the program because it was cost effective at $2.50 per student and because it would allow large numbers of students to participate. The College regarded this method of testing effective from both an educational and recruitment perspective.

In the summer of 1984, one full-time faculty member in English was released half-time, named Project Director, and designed and implemented the program, part of a $15,000 budget. The Director, working in conjunction with the President, convened a Task Force that included all senior administrators and several student affairs personnel, as well as several faculty members. To initiate the testing process and to encourage the full participation of the schools, the Task Force created the following schedule for implementing the Early English Assessment test:

MONTH	ACTIVITY
September	personal visits to principals
Early October	breakfast conference for school principals and superintendents
Late October	workshop for English teachers
November-March	testing dates selected by schools at least four weeks prior to registration for senior classes
May	end-of-year review by school administrators and teachers

The test used in Clark Technical College's Early Assessment Program was the College Board's Written English Expression Placement Test (WEEPT). This exam tests a student's skills in both basic usage and sentence analysis. Many such exams test only for "correctness" in expression or for basic usage. The WEEPT, in contrast, emphasizes the structure of sentences, the logical relationships of items in a sentence, and the clear expression of ideas. This exam consequently seemed particularly appropriate from the College's perspective since many college and university faculty members stress aspects such as style in student writing. The exam was also quite acceptable from the schools' perspective. It was judged that the use of a thoroughly tested instrument produced by an established national organization such as the College Board would help in gaining acceptance by the schools. The fact that this was an actual college placement test with norms based on over 30,000 incoming college freshmen at all different skill levels did in fact carry a great deal of weight with the school administrators. Another important consideration for school personnel was that the test takes only 25 minutes. It can be easily administered in a regular class period, which avoids disruption of the school schedule. The ultimate selling point, however, was that the College offered this service at no cost to the schools.

Within two weeks after the testing, each school received the student score sheets for individual item analysis, along

with Individual Student Reports on the WEEPT, an Individual Class Performance Report for each teacher, and a Summary Report. The Individual Student Report indicated the student's score and the level at which he/she had placed on a forty point scale. The levels were explained to the students as follows:

> There are five levels of placement. A student who scores in Level 1 would almost certainly be placed in a remedial English class upon entering college. A student who scores in Level 2 would probably be placed in a remedial English class. If a student scored in the low 20's, for example, his/her reading score and writing sample, in addition to his/her WEEPT score, would be carefully examined at most colleges to ensure accurate placement of the student. A student who scores in Level 3 or 4 would be one who would be expected to pass a beginning college composition course with the higher grades probably going to students at the top of the scale. A student in Level 5 should be considered for advanced placement.

The Report on Individual Class Performance for each teacher included an item analysis to be used for diagnostic purposes. The Summary Report sent to the principals and contact persons indicated the number of students from the school at each level, the percentage of students at each level, the percentage of incoming college freshmen at each

level, and the school's overall average as compared to the College Board's national average. At no time were any comparisons made between individual schools. Some principals made this stipulation as a condition for participation in the program. They felt that such an exam would lose its usefulness if any school were embarrassed by the results.

A principal objective of "Early Assessment" in either math or English was to encourage juniors to undertake any necessary corrective instruction in their senior year of high school. Both Ohio State and Clark Tech also encouraged all juniors to take the exam. Implicit in this request is the recognition that math and English are essential to any endeavors a student may choose to pursue. More specifically, students who might not have considered a higher education degree may be encouraged to attend college through early testing in math and English. Clark Tech also had several other less obvious objectives in mind in creating its Early Assessment Program. It wished to establish through this initial partnership a solid base of articulation with local high school administrators and to create a close working relationship with local high school teachers.

The program has more than met its objectives. Participation was excellent: 26 of 29 schools in the College's service area chose to participate in the testing of all juniors. Many of the schools also wished to test their seniors, even though that was not a College objective. At the close of the academic year, Clark Technical College had

tested nearly 7,000 students. The reports from the schools were also encouraging. Counselors found that students were asking to sign up for upper-level English classes. The principals and contact persons reported that some students who had scored higher on the test than had been expected had been encouraged to take college-prep courses instead of general ones. Some school staffs had also found some unexpected uses for the test. For example, one counselor used the exam to help plan for more remedial sections in the following year. Another principal said that he had used the test scores, along with several other instruments, to weed out potentially average students from advanced placement classes. Yet another principal used the test results to plan for more senior English courses.

The strongest indicator of the success of the program is that all 26 schools, plus one new school, plan to participate in next year's program. Most of these 27 schools are also interested in participating in a program involving a writing sample, which has been designed as Phase II of the College's Early Assessment Program. At this point, the High School Liaison Project is well on its way to creating important new partnerships with the high schools in its area, and Early Assessment in English can be regarded as an effective and essential foundation for other efforts in high school articulation.

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JAN 31 1986